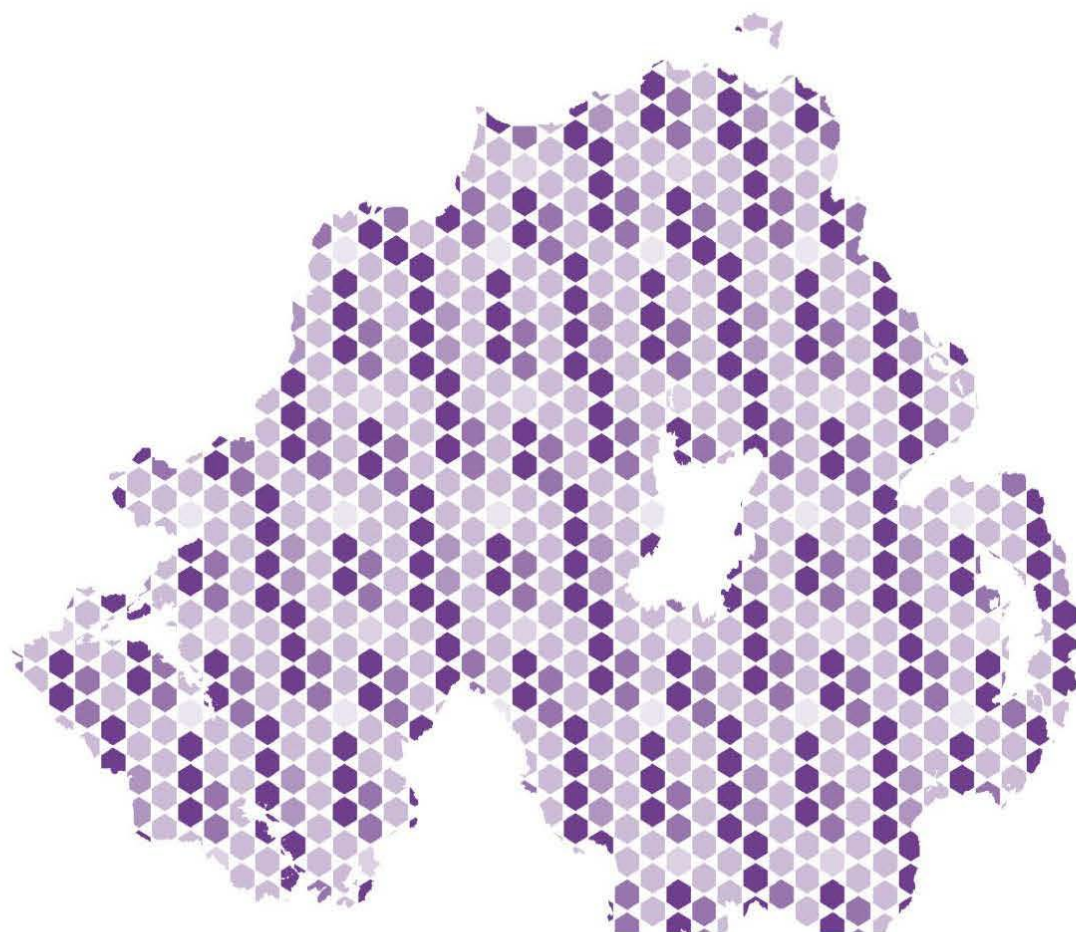


# INITIAL TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Postgraduate Certificate in  
Post-Primary Education

School of Social Sciences, Education and  
Social Work - Queen's University, Belfast

Inspected: February 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



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## **1. Context of the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) Programme in Post-Primary Education**

The Queen's University School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work (SSESW) provides a full-time programme leading to the post-primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with an enrolment in 2018-2019 of 125 students. In 2016, the School of Education was subsumed into the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work. At the time of the inspection, the Head of School had been in post for 18 months and the PGCE Director for six months; there have also been significant recent changes to staffing.

The PGCE was introduced in 1979 and its current modular form comprises three modules: Education and Professional Studies (EPS), Subject Studies, and school placements. Students are enrolled to one of seven main subject pathways: Computing/IT, English, Mathematics, Modern Languages (French, German, Irish or Spanish), Science (Biology, Physics or Chemistry), Social Science (Politics or Sociology) or Religious Education. Four supernumerary places are provided for students, who work and study in the Irish language, to undertake an enrichment programme provided by St Mary's University College which, if successfully completed, leads to the additional award of a Certificate in Bilingual Education.

While the PGCE programme is heavily oversubscribed; there is a trend in the declining number of applicants over the past five years.

## **2. Focus of the inspection**

The inspection was conducted in the terms of the Department of Education (DE) *Circular [2010/03](#) Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes* which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE.

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all students the inspection evaluated:

- the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the students; and
- the SSESW's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards.

Furthermore, the inspectors considered how well a number of broad themes, which reflect DE policy priorities for schools, are represented in the initial PGCE preparation of teachers.

The themes are:

- the extent of the students' understanding of the overarching aims, values and purposes of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) and their preparation to put their understanding into practice in schools;
- the extent to which the students recognise, understand and respond to a wide range of individual difference amongst learners in schools; and
- how well the students are being developed to take an evaluative and critical approach to teaching, assessment and learning.

Where evidence is available to report on aspects of the broad themes, they are included in this report. More detail on the purpose and method of inspection and of the evidence base is given in Appendix A.

The school visits were undertaken towards the end of the students' first school placement and the campus inspection was in the middle of the PGCE programme.

The aim of the DE Learning Leaders strategy is to, 'empower the teaching profession to strengthen its professionalism and expertise to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century'. Therefore, the inspectors reviewed the 'opportunities and responsibilities,' (Learning Leaders: A strategy for teacher professional learning (DE, 2016, page 23)) of the strategy as they relate to student teachers. The PGCE programme, by design, enables the students to develop relevant responsibilities in an effective way for this stage of their development as teachers. Furthermore, the PGCE programme was reviewed against the expectations in the Learning Leaders strategy for 'providers of professional learning' (Ibid, page 25) and, where evidence of relevant expectations to initial teacher education was available, there was a reasonable match to the strategy.

The inspection informs the self-evaluation and improvement planning of the provider and the report contains brief illustrations of effective practice, as evaluated by the provider and validated by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

### 3. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>High level of capacity for sustained improvement</b>
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Outstanding
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Very Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very Good

### 4. Outcomes for learners

The students are making very good progress in their development to become teachers. They are capable, thoughtful, articulate and confident learners, with strong dispositions to persevere with what they appreciate is a very intensive full-time programme of study. Most of them write and achieve at a high level in their academic, research-based and practical work. Individually, most work to Masters Level (Level 7). They are capable of leading their own learning as well as contributing to the learning of their peers; they work supportively together in pairs and groups.

The students are developing progressively their capacity for honest reflection on their own learning and on their school-based work experience, as evidenced in their school placement portfolio and in discussion with their peers and with inspectors. In this regard they are beginning to evaluate more effectively the outcomes for learners in school to complement their ability to reflect well on their own planning, teaching and assessment skills as teachers.

PGCE Mathematics students are trained to exploit digital technology in teaching mathematical modelling and problem-solving from Key Stage 3 to A-level. Technology use permits learners to concentrate on data collection; mathematical representation of the data; analysis and reasoning; making and testing predictions; and evaluating the utility of the model, rather than the intricacies of the mathematical procedures involved. This reduces the cognitive load associated with performing routine procedures and facilitates the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The students critically reflect on: the possibilities and tensions that the tasks may engender in a live classroom setting; the key stage(s) for which the activity would be appropriate; and the skills and capabilities being developed in the activity. They work in groups to create an outline lesson plan for a related activity, which they share with their peers. The activity equips students with the necessary skills to harness the power of digital technology tools to create authentic, meaningful and enjoyable mathematical learning experiences for their pupils.

Through active, enquiry-based and research-informed learning in the taught sessions on campus, they are building their subject knowledge and developing very good problem-solving skills, drawing well on the knowledge and expertise from their first degree subject. The students have a good understanding of their own stage of formation as teachers, expressed in terms of the teacher competences from the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI). They are developing an appreciation of how learners in schools acquire subject knowledge and skills, progressively at each age and stage of learning, and are able to respond to the range of difference amongst learners in schools.

The students have a sound knowledge, and are capable of a critical appraisal, of the Northern Ireland curriculum and a progressive understanding of cross-curricular skills and dispositions. They are less clear, however, on how individual subjects across the school curriculum link to each other and the importance of teaching which makes connections between subject areas.

Through well-selected and appropriate reference resources in the subject modules and also through guided reading in mixed tutorial groups, they are developing a capacity to understand how educational research is relevant to and applies to their practical work as teachers.

The pedagogical role of virtual reality is considered by the PGCE Computing students. Starting with the creation of Virtual Reality Tours complete with hotspots, music and narration, the students gain a first-hand experience of novel cross-curricular ICT (U ICT) activities addressing the '5E's', including peer assessment via the QUB Canvas online learning platform. As part of an on-going research collaboration between their own tutor and her colleagues in PGCE Geography and Technology & Design at Ulster University, the creative use of a 360 degree camera was the natural progression towards the production of bespoke reusable learning objects facilitating subject-specific immersive experiences. Building on the success of the current PGCE students' outputs, the tutors have already embarked on a broader phase two collaboration with partners across the island of Ireland with the aim of addressing the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, which advocates the embedding of digital technologies across the continuum of teacher education from ITE through Induction to continuing professional learning.

Entry to each subject area is highly competitive and there is a high retention rate over the course of the programme. Pass rates and progression to employment in education are very high. However, university careers service data does not reveal the status of that employment which, according to contacts retained by the module leaders varies considerably from subject to subject.

## 5. Quality of provision

The quality of the PGCE provision is very good. The quality of the teaching observed is of a consistently high standard; in all of the main subjects most of the teaching is very good or better, with one-fifth outstanding. Across the EPS module and in the mixed Collaborative Inquiry Groups the teaching observed was consistently very good. There is variation across the modules in how well cross-curricular ICT is addressed in subject contexts.

Students participate in cross-subject Collaborative Inquiry Groups, designed to enable students to develop habits of critical reflection, inquiry and collaboration. They engage in professional learning that is collegial and cross-disciplinary, in a way that reflects the reality of school environments. The activities are designed to help students make theory-to-practice links so that over time they can gain confidence in adapting their practice in ways that are research-informed. For example, the students evaluate and respond to a fictional case study of a student teacher dealing with a range of behaviours, responding to diversity and developing pedagogical techniques that are appropriate for learners with varying abilities. The case study materials include descriptions of classroom scenarios, extracts from the student teacher's lesson evaluations and a summary of the university tutor's comments after a lesson observation. The students are provided with a range of readings which support them in reflecting on the issues in relation to the GTCNI competences, regional policy and practice, and relevant international research and theory. Each week, the students discuss the issues and co-teach their peers, grounding their discussion of key issues in relevant theoretical literature. Overall, through collaborative inquiry groups, beginning teachers develop foundational skills of applying learning to real practice-based issues in a supportive and collegial environment.

Module leaders are all experienced subject specialists who carry out their specialist teaching with considerable authority, enthusiasm and a very effective research-engaged approach to their teaching. The design of the programme enables each student to enrol in a subject course, and in an educational and professional studies course which addresses effectively a range of generic educational and cross-curricular aspects.

There is, however, no subsidiary subject offered and, while some subjects are diversified in their approach, which enables students to learn about the demands of different kinds of general and vocational pathways, this is not consistent across all subjects. The programme could be better adjusted to the school curriculum, especially at KS4 and post-16. The findings of the inspection endorse the action set out in the PGCE Programme Development Plan to review and revise course offerings as both timely and very appropriate.

The students engage with a rich range of learning activities and resources, including the well-developed use of several virtual learning environments to host resources, assignments and as a medium for marking and for tutors to provide feedback to the students.

PGCE Modern Languages was selected by the Centre for Educational Development (CED) at Queen's in June 2018 to be an Early Adopter of 'Canvas', the University's new online learning environment. Modern Languages students use the Canvas discussion forum to engage in reflection on their practice in schools and allows students to record video messages as well as text. Further, the ability to post video messages is made easier through a Canvas mobile App which students can access directly on their phones or tablet devices. The result has been increased motivation amongst students for engagement in the discussion forum as well as providing an alternative format through which students can reflect on their practice. Canvas provides lecturers with the 'Speedgrader' tool which includes a rich range of features to enhance the way in which comments can be made when marking essays. As well as standard comment boxes and tracked changes, Speedgrader allows the lecturer to provide video and audio comments to explain the reasons for the changes they suggest in the text. So, greater opportunities are afforded for in-depth tailored feedback.

All of the module leaders are research-active, publishing refereed research papers and/or undertaking doctorate research. The School's educational research has been rated fourth in relation to research intensity within the UK in the [research excellence framework](#) amongst UK higher education institutions.

The design of the programme and modules, including approaches to assessment, ensures that the students are, explicitly, introduced to and develop a very good knowledge and understanding of the NIC, including the cross-curricular skills, the GTCNI competences and values and their purpose. The provision is supplemented well by a range of guest speakers, school practitioners and external specialist agencies. Throughout the course, the students are introduced, through specific planned sessions, to an excellent range of diversity issues and inclusion challenges in education.

The capacity of the students to develop a critical, reflective approach to practice is developed well through the design of the programme, the teaching, assessment and self-assessment of their coursework and their school experience placements.

Four supernumerary places are available each year for students interested in teaching in post-primary Irish-medium education (IME). The students are identified during recruitment to the PGCE and undergo selection by St Mary's University College to join an IME enhancement course taught by the College, in coordination with the University, and leading to the award of a Certificate in Bilingual Education by the College. The course aims to prepare post-primary PGCE students to teach in Irish by developing their Irish language competence and their knowledge and understanding of immersion education, in parallel with their PGCE studies. The co-ordination of the enhancement course is effective and, as a result develops: the students' knowledge and understanding of [IME](#); their awareness of the professional skills required to teach their specialist subject(s) through the medium of Irish; and their independence, flexibility and creativity to improve their competence in Irish.

The extensive range and effectiveness of the University's student welfare and support services impacts positively on the students' care and welfare.

## **6. Leadership and management**

The merger of the former School of Education into a new School (SSESW), with consequent recent changes in leadership, including of the PGCE programme, has been challenging; the merger is in transition in terms of governance, leadership, management, accountability, reporting and communication arrangements.

The senior leadership of the SSESW have a clear view of the challenges, in the context of the key performance indicators for the SSESW and the aims of the PGCE programme. Collectively, they are supportive of the programme and its staff through the uncertainties of change.

The recently appointed PGCE Programme Director works effectively and efficiently; he has analysed the needs of Northern Ireland schools and how the PGCE programme should respond. He led the creation of a Programme Development Plan which identifies a range of actions for improvement and enhancement, many of which are endorsed by the findings of this inspection as providing a very appropriate baseline. Further work is needed by faculty to prioritise the many planned actions and to associate resources, leaders and specific timescales to enable the implementation of the actions; and, to develop an inclusive process for the monitoring, evaluation and review of the programme in conjunction with the highly appropriate PGCE programme aims.

The module leaders support the achievement of the aims of the programme by effective leadership of their respective subject modules and their joint work on the EPS module. The strength of their independence, as module leaders, results in an appropriate scope for innovation in how they support and assess student progress in subject-relevant ways.

However, while freedom to innovate is a strength, module leaders have insufficient opportunity to share their most effective, tested practices for the benefit of the students, and lead to better consistency; not coherence for its own sake, but for the sake of improving collegiality and shared professional learning and, in turn, modelling collegial practice for student teachers.

## **7. Overall effectiveness**

The provider has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.



### Inspection methodology and evidence base

The inspection was conducted within the terms of the DE *Circular [2010/03 Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes](#)* which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE. In order to meet the standard of being at least *satisfactory* as evaluated by the ETI (as set out in the Circular), the provision may have some areas for improvement which are judged by the ETI to be within the capacity of the provider to amend, but must not require significant or urgent improvement in any aspect.

The ETI document [Self-evaluation and inspection of initial teacher education provision](#) (ETI 2018) sets out the approach for the inspection in more detail. In advance of the visit, the provider produced a portfolio for the reaccreditation process as required by for the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Lecturers were also invited to identify and describe briefly instances of good practice which illustrate aspects of the self-evaluation and inspection framework. A selection of these is included in this report.

The arrangements included the inspection of a sample of 12 school placement lessons taught by students and observation of the assessment of and feedback by the tutors. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with, for example, teacher-tutors, teachers, heads of department and principals in post-primary schools.

In the week of 25 February 2019 a team of inspectors carried out a campus-based inspection at Queen's University. The inspectors observed first-hand 31 sessions taught by nine academic staff ranging from lectures, seminars and practical workshops in specialist subjects to presentations by students. They talked, formally and informally, to a selection of students and lecturers; discussed samples of the students' work with the students concerned; attended leadership meetings and discussions, including a meeting with the Head and senior staff of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work; scrutinised policy, planning, quality assurance and evaluation documents; and reviewed the resources, including the extensive provision for learning online.

### Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

### Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management (And the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable):

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

### Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the provider for this programme:

The provider has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The provider demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The provider needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

The provider needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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